

# Joeun Kim Aatchim

## *Sheer Painer*

November 18, 2023 – January 6, 2024



François Ghebaly is proud to present *Sheer Painer*, the newest exhibition by South Korean, Brooklyn-based artist Joeun Kim Aatchim and her first time exhibiting at our Downtown Los Angeles space.

The interruption that illness is, and the further interruptions that it brings, are disruptions of memory. The disruption is not of remembering; people's memories of illness are often remarkable in their precision and duration.

– Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics*, 1995

Illness—still can't speak about the truth behind my recent no-shows.

– Joeun Kim Aatchim, "Indoor Only Clothes," *Eye Jailed Eye*, 2019

Artist and poet Joeun Kim Aatchim has long embraced her English second language as a site of invention. In her publications of writing and poetry, including *Four of Mattresses Stacked on Misery* (2017), *eye jailed eye* (2019) and last year's *In Praise of Cry Breaks* 눈물 휴식 예찬 (2016-2022), as well as in her artworks themselves, incidences of miscommunication and neologism become handholds with which to brook and examine the evasive, opaque, or incommunicable. *Sheer Painer*, her newest exhibition of paintings and drawings on silk, is no exception. "Painer," a portmanteau-esque reduction of "painter," is the artist's own moniker in her enduring battle with chronic pain that, within the new exhibition, becomes the recurring strain.

Beyond their difficult portrayals of pain and respite—the artist's own figure in the throes of invisible, endogenous hurts—many artworks in *Sheer Painer* directly measure Aatchim's fine mobility during periods of changing physical wellness over the past year. The painting *Crude in Me* (2023) comes from one such episode; the rough outline of a blue-violet figure is left open and undefined, instead washed in

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urgent layers of silver pigment. "Sheer," meanwhile, a loose reference to British novelist C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, describes Aatchim's vulnerability in portraying on translucent silk such naked and intimate grief. "Sheer" also points to a kind of consolidation or extremity in her latest work, an "amputation of frill and limbs for my survival, and until only the core is left—the urgency of sharing my first thoughts as raw drawings."

*Sheer Painer* is, in brief, an epistolic study of suffering and healing, an anatomy of comfort and discomfort that for Aatchim, like many others, offers prognoses hardly as clear-cut. "The past," writes sociologist Arthur W. Frank, "is remembered with such arresting lucidity because it is not being experienced as past; the illness experiences that are being told are unassimilated fragments that refuse to become past, haunting the present." In one work, *My Cyclical—Sundowner's Chronicle (Still Life with Dayflowers from Fishers Island, Rocket air blaster, Wire clipper, and a Nutcracker)* (2023), Aatchim inscribes the ekphratic refrain, "a sundowner... find me only in the morning, midday wilt," around a still-life of cut Asiatic dayflowers, short-lived blooms that rarely last into the afternoon. In another painting, *Blessed to be Bruised; Self Portrait as Fragrance of a Quince, (Winter in Seorae Maeul, Seoul)* (2023), Aatchim hides a bowl of yellow quinces at the far right of the canvas. The fruits, rendered in metallic copper and 24-karat gold pigment, are remembrances of a pair picked in a hospital garden while awaiting surgery last winter. Though sweet smelling, the fragile flesh of the yellow quince is bitterly tannic and easily bruised. And yet, the more they bruise and blight, the more fragrant they become. Still other symbols, allegories, epitaphs, and poetics of remission and deliverance punctuate the grave bittersweetness that veils Aatchim's *Sheer Painer*.

"I realize the artworks won't truly be finished until people's faces are reflecting in them," she remarks, referencing a small handful of new drawings on silk—prostrate, supplicant figures, many of which are her own, rendered in stone pigment and shellac, and encased in layers of mirrored glass that partially capture the viewer's reflection. For Aatchim, these reflections are admissions of imperfection, of the outside world bleeding onto the silk surfaces, blurring the ends of her own pain and resilience with the beginnings of the viewer's in gestures that identify us all, at some point in life, in wrestles of loss and hope.

But it is different this time.  
I can feel it I am winning the battle.  
This time no relapse.

I am healing from the virus that is you  
You made me fatigued  
so long and so many ways.

So ready for the die-off.  
Damn die-off

I am prepared for this day of die-off.  
I can drink vinegar like how you drink water.

Die-off, that's my due.

– Joeun Kim Aatchim, "Die-off," *Eye Jailed Eye*, 2019

**Joeun Kim Aatchim** (b. South Korea) is a visual artist based in New York City. Aatchim received her BFA from New York University, as well as her MFA from Columbia University. Recent solo exhibitions include François Ghebaly, New York (2022); Make Room, Los Angeles (2022, 2020); and Harper's, East Hampton (2021). Recent group exhibitions include Aranya Art Center, China (2023); Harper's, New York (2023, 2022); François Ghebaly, Los Angeles (2022); Jeffrey Deitch, New York (2022); and The Drawing Center, New York (2019). Aatchim has received awards and fellowships at Corporation of Yaddo (2023), Triangle Art Association (2021); The Drawing Center (2018-20); and Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2017).